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SENSITIVE

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [ZI](#) [MDC](#)

SUBJECT: MDC ANNOUNCES NEW STRATEGY

REF: HARARE 1958

[1](#)1. SUMMARY. (SBU) On September 30, MDC President Morgan Tsvangirai briefed the diplomatic community on the MDC's

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position on various current issues. While Tsvangirai did not reveal anything earth shattering, he did acknowledge that some contact with ZANU-PF was ongoing but said that the inter-party talks process had not been yet been launched nor achieved agreement. He also gave a nine-month timetable for change in Zimbabwe and expressed appreciation to the SADC diplomats for facilitating meetings between the MDC delegation and SADC heads of state. END SUMMARY.

TSVANGIRAI BRIEFS DIPLOMATS

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[1](#)2. (U) On September 30, MDC President Morgan Tsvangirai briefed the diplomatic community on the MDC's position on various current issues, including developments on a ZANU-PF/MDC dialogue and the regional tour recently completed by MDC leadership. The MDC called the diplomatic briefing one day before the October 1 deadline for talks that Tsvangirai reportedly had set earlier. During the question and answer period, Tsvangirai maintained that there had never been an October 1 deadline and that no one had threatened mass action. He blamed the press for distorting his words. He said the MDC court challenge to the 2002 presidential election slated to begin on November 3 would continue as scheduled unless there was "demonstrable and irreversible" progress toward a solution to the crisis. He did not rule out using mass action but said it would be "determined by circumstances."

INTER-PARTY DIALOGUE

[1](#)3. (U) Tsvangirai said dialogue between the two principals (President Robert Mugabe and Morgan Tsvangirai) would resolve the crisis in the long term. He commented that, while the church initiative and other attempts to broker a negotiation were good efforts, they had not broken the impasse between the two leaders. He expressed appreciation for Mugabe's conciliatory statements during the Muzenda funeral but was skeptical of the sincerity of the public announcement and of the will to implement change. (See Reftel.) He said the MDC had done a few things to try to break the ice, such as attending the opening session of Parliament and Vice President Simon Muzenda's funeral, and this had palliated suspicion but had only improved informal relations between the two party's members.

TIMETABLE REVEALED

[1](#)4. (U) During the question and answer period, one diplomat asked Tsvangirai for a timetable for a new Zimbabwe. Tsvangirai said that after a meaningful dialogue has begun,

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he could envision a three-month period of negotiations followed by 3-6 months of transition, ultimately leading to elections. He thought this should all happen by mid-2004 if Zimbabwe is to survive. He then revealed that during the first weekend in October, the party would be issuing new policy papers, which would be available to the public at a later date. He intimated that the party would try to market its policies better, after being criticized over the last few years for not having clear-cut policies.

MENDING FENCES WITH SADC

[1](#)5. (U) Tsvangirai expressed appreciation to SADC diplomats

for facilitating meetings between the MDC delegation and various SADC heads of state. He said the delegation would travel to other countries in the region (Botswana, South Africa, and Angola) and may travel to Nigeria too. Tsvangirai said the purpose of the trips was to give an

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alternative interpretation of the crisis and to offer possible solutions. He claimed that the delegation has been well received in the host countries and that the meetings had been successful, with no one disputing the cause of the crisis--poor governance--rather than "land" or "Britain" as Mugabe would have it. He added that as long as Mugabe thinks he has the support of SADC leaders he would not budge in his position. He asked SADC to help the process by urging ZANU-PF to the negotiating table.

PERSONAL FREEDOMS STILL DENIED

16. (U) Tsvangirai said he was disturbed that despite the MDC's efforts to break the tension between ZANU-PF and MDC, the ruling party had closed the Daily News. (The MDC also circulated a strong statement from the Tsvangirai about the closure of the Daily News.) Tsvangirai said the closure of the newspaper was an attack on the MDC by ZANU-PF, even though the Daily News is not owned by the MDC. He vowed that the MDC would do everything it could to get the paper back up and running. He lamented the MDC's lack of access to public media and implored the international community to express outrage over the attack on freedom of expression.

17. (U) On the electoral process and the August elections, Tsvangirai denied claims that the electoral environment had

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improved much. He said that although there may have been less violence during the urban council elections, the electoral process was still not free and fair, particularly due to the problems with the voters roll and prevention of candidate registration.

COMMENT

18. (SBU) The MDC diplomatic briefing signals a shift in its public relations strategy. The combination of the regional tour and diplomatic briefing suggests that the party is seeking to strengthen its diplomatic links. Tsvangirai was also careful to praise the SADC diplomats for their assistance with the MDC delegation, a welcome change after months of acerbic attacks on Zimbabwe's neighbors. Tsvangirai's comments about the public perception that the

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MDC has no policies and admission that the party failed in the marketing of its policies also suggest a change in focus.

Through bolstering its public image and international credibility, the MDC may hope to bring Mugabe to the negotiating table with Tsvangirai. END COMMENT.

SULLIVAN